THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SATURDAY • MARCH 30, 2024 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 18 • LATE CITY EDITION

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INDIA-UKRAINE AGREE TO RESTORE PRE-CONFLICT COOPERATION LEVEL

Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said he had comprehensive talks with India about the situation in 'our regions', global security

PEACE FORMULA FOR UKRAINE DISCUSSED

Kuleba, who is in India on a two-day official visit, wrote on X, "We paid specific attention to the Peace Formula and next steps on the path of its implementation." The peace formula, first mooted by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2022, is a set of principles aimed at ensuring a just and lasting peace for his country

BOTH NATIONS TO MEET AGAIN THIS YEAR

- Both the countries agreed to work towards holding the 7th Inter-Governmental Commission meeting on trade, economic, scientific, technical, industrial and cultural cooperation later this year
- India's foreign minister S Jaishankar wrote on X, "Our immediate goal is to get trade back to earlier levels" | P9

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DRONES, MISSILES WERE LAUNCHED IN UKRAINE ON FRIDAY BY RUSSIA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Tax terror, says Congress as it gets notice for over ₹1,800 cr

Govt weaponised income tax dept to harass the principal opposition party, claims Kharge

PARVEZ SULTAN @ New Delhi

THE Congress on Friday said it got a fresh income tax notice asking it to pay ₹1,823 crore, triggering angry reactions from party leaders who described it as 'tax terrorism' aimed at financially crippling the main opposition party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. They said the party will hold massive protests across states on Saturday against the "egregious attack on democracy and imposition of tax terrorism".

Former party chief Rahul Gandhi said such assault on democracy is unpardonable and 'exemplary action' will be taken against those responsible when the government changes.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP-led government is misusing all federal agencies to subvert democracy and belittle the Constitution. The government has weaponised the I-T department to harass the principal opposition party, he charged.

Accusing the Narendra Modi government of selectively targeting opposition parties, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said if the I-T department applies the same principle to all parties, then it should demand ₹4,600 crore from the BJP because it is a bigger violator.

"We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to the Election Commission. The party has faltered every year," Maken claimed. "I-T department has so far forcibly taken ₹135 crore from our bank accounts against an alleged violation of ₹14 lakh. This amount was recovered by freezing over ₹270 crore in our bank accounts... If the same principles are applied on violations by the BJP, the I-T department should raise a demand of ₹4,600 for the party and act swiftly like it had done in the case of Congress," he added.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the BJP's attempts to weaken the Opposition won't work as the party's morale is high. "We will continue contesting elections passionately," he said at a press conference. Rebutting the charges, the BJP said the Congress is not above the laws of the land. "A certain family of the Congress believes that they should be exempted from rules and that special laws should apply to them. It is not feasible in modern India," BJP national spokesperson Zafar Islam said.

REACTIONS

When the govt changes, action will be taken against those who have disrobed democracy. Such exemplary action will be taken that no one will dare to do all this again

Rahul Gandhi

₹4,600 Cr penalty overlooked for BJP's ₹42 Cr unaccounted deposit, while ₹135 Cr penalty is demanded for ₹14 lakh cash deposit by Cong MLAs & MPs!

Mallikarjun Kharge

FINMIN DEFENDS IT, SAYS BASED ON 2019 SEIZURES

MONIKA YADAV @ New Delhi

JUSTIFYING the income tax notices issued to the Congress, finance ministry sources said the tax department had reopened assessments of the party for seven years (from AY 2014-15 to AY 2020-21) on the basis of incriminating material seized during search operations conducted in April 2019.

Two Delhi High Court orders, dated 22 March and 28 March 2024, allowed the reassessment. "Notices under Section 153C of Income Tax Act were issued in March 2023. The assessment proceedings for these seven years were getting time-barred on 31 March 2024 as per law," said a senior official.

The Congress had approached the HC for quashing of reassessment under Section 153C for all the seven years but it dismissed the writs. The HC in its order observed that there was an evasion of ₹520 crore income. "In its order, the HC held that the tax department has substantial and concrete evidence warranting further scrutiny under the IT Act. The HC further observed that the satisfaction note details the unaccounted transactions with reference to various elections," the source said.

Another official told *TNIE* that sufficient time was given to the party to reply, especially on various observations of the HC. "After considering all the replies, the department has now completed the assessment of seven years."

In an issue pertaining to AY 2018-19, the Congress faced the withdrawal of exemption under Section 13A of the IT Act due to violations of mandatory conditions. Despite multiple communications and rejection of stay applications, the party failed to comply with the tax demand.

As per sources, recovery proceedings were initiated, resulting in the recovery of around ₹135 crore. The I-T Appellate Tribunal and the Delhi HC upheld the decision.

CPI gets tax notice for ₹11 crore dues

THE CPI has received a notice from the income tax department demanding ₹11 cr 'dues' for using an old PAN card while filing tax returns during the last few years. The amount includes penalties and interest due to "discrepancies" in the use of an old PAN card. Earlier, the I-T department had withdrawn the tax exemption of the CPI(M) for 2016-17 and taxed it ₹15.59 crore for not declaring a bank account. Besides, TMC's Saket Gokhale claimed he got 11 I-T notices in the last 72 hours

B'LURU CAFE BLAST

NIA announces ₹10L bounty for info on each accused, releases new photos

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

A day after arresting Muzammil Shareef – the key conspirator in The Rameshwaram Cafe blast case – the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday issued photographs and details of the main accused, Mussavir Hussain Shazib (30), and another key conspirator, Abdul Matheen Taha (30), and also announced Rs 10 lakh reward for credible information leading to the arrest of each.

Shazib alias Shazeb alias Md Juned Hussain alias Mohammed Juned Sayed is a resident of Masjid Road, Thirthahalli, Shivamogga. "He is fair, tall and has a gym-type body. He has been using forged driving licence in the name of Mohammed Juned Sayed or other similar forged

Mussavir Shazib

Abdul Taha

ID documents to conceal his identity. His preferred clothing is jeans and T-shirts, wears a black smart watch, mask, wig and fake beard. Shazib stays in boys hostels, PG accomodations and low-budget hotels and lodgings," the NIA has stated.

On Taha, the NIA stated that he uses Hindu names like Vignesh and Sumit; is medium built and bald from front. "He prefers wearing jeans, T-shirt, caps, hoodies, mask and fake beard. Taha also stays in men's hostels and low-budget accomodations," NIA stated. This is the second time that the NIA has announced a bounty on Taha. In May 2020, the Central agency had announced a reward of Rs 3 lakh on information leading to his arrest in the Al-Hind IS Bengaluru module case (RC-4/2020/NIA/DLI), which is said to be behind the murder of a Hindu leader in Tamil Nadu.

The Bengaluru-based Al Hind IS module, which is active in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, was allegedly put together by Mehboob Pasha, a resident of Gurappana Palya, Bengaluru and Khaja Moideen, a resident of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, who are accused in some murder cases of Hindutva leaders in Tamil Nadu. CONTINUED ON: P3

Former CM Basavaraj Bommai, BJP state president B Y Vijayendra, JDS state chief H D Kumaraswamy, former CM BS Yediyurappa, former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda and Leader of Opposition R Ashoka at a BJP-JDS coordination meeting in Bengaluru on Friday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

Kolar ticket: CM, DCM push for neutral candidate as minister hardens stand

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

WITH Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa hardening his stand on a ticket for his son-in-law Chikkapeddanna from the Kolar Lok Sabha constituency, it has become difficult for Congress to resolve the imbroglio.

It was only earlier this week that five Congress legislators, opposed to Muniyappa's plan and followers of former speaker KR Ramesh Kumar, had gone to the Vidhana Soudha and threatened to quit their positions if the ticket is given to Chikkdapeddanna and have also made it clear that they will not work for the party if Muniyappa's son-in-law is picked. They want an SC right candidate.

But Muniyappa stuck to his guns on Friday. If any other candidate is picked, he will face trouble, he warned. There is talk now of Congress leaders choosing KV Goutham, an SC left candidate.

"The situation has still not reached a flashpoint. If Ramesh Kumar and I are united, we can win both Kolar and Chikkaballapur LS seats," Muniyappa said. He also claimed that he is ready to reconcile with Ramesh Kumar and had even visited the latter's house, but could not meet him.

Claiming that he is a disciplined soldier of the party, Muniyappa took a dig at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, saying they are not large-hearted enough to resolve the Kolar ticket issue. "There will be negotiation for other seats, but why is it not possible only in Kolar," he asked. P4

Cong list out for 3 seats

Congress on Friday declared its candidates for three seats, but withheld decision on the Kolar seat. Sunil Bose, son of minister Dr HC Mahadevappa, got the ticket for Chamarajanagar seat, Raksha Ramaiah from Chikkaballapura and Sanduru MLA E Tukaram from Ballari | P4

It's HDK from Mandya, Mallesh from Kolar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

FORMER chief minister and JDS state president HD Kumaraswamy will contest the Lok Sabha elections from Mandya, the regional party announced on Friday.

HD Revanna's son and incumbent MP Prajwal Revanna will seek reelection from Hassan, while M Mallesh Babu will be the candidate from Kolar.

As part of its alliance with the BJP, the JDS got three seats Hassan, Mandya, and Kolar. The BJP has already announced its candidates for 25 seats.

BJP-JDS leaders have held a series of meetings to ensure proper coordination between the leaders and workers at all levels.

While Prajwal's candidature was already decided, all eyes were on Mandya. In 2019, Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil lost against Sumalatha Ambareesh, who had contested as an independent candidate backed by BJP.

While JDS has a strong base in the district, the BJP's support will be crucial for the party.

In Kolar, JDS candidate Mallesh will be hoping to make the most of the differences among the local Congress leaders that has delayed the announcement of the candidate. Mallesh had contested Assembly polls from Bangarpet and lost by a narrow margin.

EXPRESS READ

10 killed after SUV falls into gorge in J&K

Jammu: Ten people were killed after an SUV skidded off the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and fell into a gorge in Ramban district on Friday. The vehicle was on the way to Jammu from Srinagar when it fell into a 300-foot gorge at the Battery Cheshma area around 1.15 am. The bodies of nine passengers and the driver have been recovered.

Indian Navy trying to rescue hijacked vessel

New Delhi: The Indian Navy on Friday said it is currently engaged in an operation to rescue a hijacked Iranian fishing vessel, which was reportedly boarded by nine armed pirates. Based on inputs about a potential piracy incident on board Iranian fishing vessel 'Al Kambar 786' on Thursday late evening, two Indian naval ships were diverted to intercept the hijacked vessel.

Buzz on wife Sunita's elevation as Delhi CM in place of Kejriwal

ANUP VERMA @ New Delhi

HAVING held three press conferences in a week following the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), his proactive wife Sunita is being seen as a possible candidate for elevation as the CM.

Though the AAP insists that Kejriwal will run the government from jail, its dismissal based on Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena's recommendation cannot be ruled out.

Saxena has already said he would not allow the state government to be run from jail. It was read as an advice to Kejriwal to install a new person at the helm; else the Centre could invoke Article 239AB of the Constitution to impose President's Rule. This Article was incorporated specifically for the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. It is similar to Article 356. Article 239AB allows the L-G to recommend Central rule by suspending the House.

File picture of Sunita Kejriwal

United Nations weighs in

A spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the global body hoped people's "political and civil rights" are protected and everyone is able to vote in a free and fair atmosphere, in the wake Kejriwal's arrest

Sunita on Friday initiated a 'Kejriwal *ko Aashirwad*' campaign, sharing two WhatsApp numbers for his supporters to send their messages irrespective of gender, age, financial status and party affiliation.

Analysts saw in her press meets an indication of her possible bigger role. That she sat on the chair Kejriwal used to occupy at home during his public interactions did not go unnoticed. Sunita is a former IRS officer with 22 years of experience in service.

The BJP, however, mocked it, with Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri comparing Sunita with former Bihar CM Rabri Devi, saying she is perhaps preparing to hold the post of her husband.

TOP OF THE PICK

IIMB students get big offers, median salary at ₹32.5L

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

OVER 500 students from the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIM-B) were successfully placed in 163 companies during the placement season this year. While 487 students will work in India, 29 have been placed abroad with Infosys Consulting (seven), Strategy and Middle East (six), Jindal Shadeed (five), TransformationX (three), EY Parthenon Singapore (two), JP Morgan Chase London (two), Health City Cayman Islands (two), Fast Retailing, Japan (one) and Landmark Group, Middle East (one) selecting the students. The median salary stood at Rs 32.5 lakh per annum. The students had enrolled into the Post Graduate Programme in Business Analytics (PGPBA) and Post Graduate Programme in Management (PGP) for 2024.

Of the 516 offers made, most came from consulting firms, selecting 218 students and 81 from finance, banking and investment sectors. Ganesh N Prabhu, Chairperson, Career Development Services, IIM-B said, "In a difficult placement year, we are immensely grateful to Accenture as they reposed confidence in IIM-B students by making a record of 58 offers across its three units – Global Networks, India Markets Unit and Data & AI."

IT and e-commerce firms made 49 offers each, manufacturing and infrastructure firms 36 offers, conglomerates 30 and consumer goods and retail firms 28. Also, analytics and AI firms made 13 offers and healthcare-related companies 12 offers.

Some of the companies that came for the placement season included Accenture Global Networks, McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group, PwC Consulting, TCS Management Consulting, Bain & Company, EY India, Deloitte and many more. Finance firms such as Goldman Sachs, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv, CitiBank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and other multinational companies too selected candidates. From among tech companies, Microsoft, HCL Tech, Salesforce, Tech Mahindra and Unacademy picked students.

Eight conglomerates, like Adani Group, Reliance Industries, Vedanta, Air India, CK Birla Group, Aditya Birla Group, Tata Administrative Services and Mahindra & Mahindra made 30 offers.

B'luru records 36.4°C, highest in last five years

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

BENGALURU city on Friday recorded a maximum temperature of 36.4 degrees Celsius, which is the highest in the last five years. According to IMD, this is the fourth highest in the last 15 years and third highest in the last 10 years.

IMD has also issued a heatwave warning across Karnataka for the next three days. In Kalaburagi and Bagalkot, the maximum temperature was 40.9 and 40.6 degrees Celsius, respectively. A yellow alert has been issued for Kalaburagi, Raichur, Vijayapura, Yadgir, Bagalkot and Koppal.

"A heatwave alert and warning has been issued for March 29-31. There will also be a 2-3 degrees Celsius rise across interior Karnataka and a heatwave warning has also been issued for most parts of the state," the IMD official said.

The all-time record for Bengaluru is 38.9 degrees Celsius, recorded on March 22, 1931.